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ABSTRACT

Listening skills are enormously important both in and of themselves and as correlates with reading comprehension. Storytelling is a very productive approach for encouraging listening skills. Perhaps the focal point relative to promoting listening competencies rests with generating appropriate attitudes among listeners. Directions for listening to a story must provide students with reasons for listening, thus fostering motivation. Writing and retelling activities can easily be added, thus adding an enriching pair of dimensions. Practice leads the storyteller/reading teacher to develop comfortably a frame of mind for seeing the potential for comprehension instruction in a wide variety of stories. The teacher/storyteller no longer needs to focus on developing comprehension skills but can ease into discussion and questioning strategies that flow naturally from the story itself. Storytelling is an integral part of the language arts program and enriching, both as an artistic endeavor and a competence building activity. (One figure is included.) (MG)

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ENHANCING LISTENING COMPREHENSION THROUGH STORYTELLING

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The central purpose of storytelling in the classroom is for enjoyment, both on the part of the storyteller and the audience. On the other hand, teachers can integrate the art of storytelling with practical competence building activities, particularly listening skills. While telling a story, without diminishing its joyful properties, the instructor can focus on one or several listening comprehension skills in a subtle manner. For example, the age old tale of the three bears is a natural for providing direct instruction in sequencing and cause and effect relationships. Should the storyteller/reading teacher desire, there are other listening comprehension competencies he or she can promote through telling the story of the three bears. The key is being sensitive to comprehension enhancing activities that can be facilitated through telling a particular story.

The purpose of telling stories and finding stories to tell is not to fit them to listening comprehension competencies. Quite the opposite is true. The storyteller is encouraged first and foremost to tell good stories effectively and then determine if the story lends itself to particular or general instruction. The storyteller/teacher can collect favorite stories and determine, through studying a checklist, what listening skills can be encouraged. The storyteller/teacher can then keep the checklist for future reference and/or specifically designate particular stories for times during the school year when promotion of a

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particular listening comprehension skill is emphasized. For example, if a basal series in use strongly emphasizes predicting outcomes in a particular unit, the teacher/storyteller might designate particular stories for this time frame. In this light, listening and reading comprehension go hand in hand. An extensive review of research led Ekwall and Shanker (1983) to discover a number of studies suggesting a strong relationship between comprehension after listening and comprehension after reading. Rubin (1985) determined that listening "is the foundation for the sequential development of language arts" (pg.64). Rubin further proposed that a person with inadequate listening comprehension competencies will likely be deficient in reading comprehension.

A model for matching stories with comprehension skills is presented in Figure 1. A simple checkmark suggesting that a particular skill can be richly studied might be a sufficient indicator or a graded system might be used. For example, degree of appropriateness might be designated as follows: 1= excellent, 2= good, etc. Practice leads the storyteller/reading teacher to comfortably develop a frame of mind for seeing the potential for comprehension instruction in a wide variety of stories. While still enjoying stories, the storyteller/teacher is always alert for opportunities to enhance comprehension.

Figure 1: Listening Comprehension Skills Checklist

Story	Main Idea	Determining Sequence	Noting Detail	Making Inferences	Finding Cause/Effect	Making Predictions	Fantasy and Realism	Fact/Opinion	Evaluating	Building Experiential Background
Three Bears (sample)										

This model lists several of the most important comprehension skills but the list should not be limited to those presented above. The idea here is not to define the skills or the stories to be used but rather to present a concept for application in a wide variety of circumstances. Stories can be told that children could not read themselves. Learning to listen more effectively is a forerunner of improved reading comprehension, especially for poor readers. Snider and Tarver (1987) concluded that poor readers are denied the opportunity to comprehend stories rich in language because of their inability to read. On the other hand, they have the capacity to listen to stories rich in language. Further, storytelling, in the tradition of the whole language approach, focuses on meaning. This helps listeners more fully appreciate learning to listen effectively as a meaningful activity. The listener is encouraged to recognize listening as a process for obtaining meaning.

Perhaps the focal point relative to promoting listening competencies rests with generating appropriate attitudes among listeners. Directions for listening to a story, must provide students with reasons for listening, thus fostering motivation. For example, listening for the purpose of detecting a sequence of events encourages both listening comprehension skills and general ability to focus attention. Writing can be added by having students work either individually or collaboratively to prepare a written account of what was heard. Retelling also provides valuable input relative to evaluating how well students listened. Retelling also provides practice in remembering what was heard and logically arranging thoughts for oral presentation.

Telling stories with listening comprehension skills as a valuable by-product over a period of time promotes within the storyteller/teacher

an instinct for integrating the joy of a story with the practicality of skills instruction. The teacher/storyteller no longer needs to focus on developing comprehension skills but can comfortably ease into discussion and questioning strategies that flow naturally from the story itself.

Summary

Listening skills are enormously important both in and of themselves and as correlates with reading comprehension. Storytelling is a very productive approach for encouraging listening skills. Teachers can, by design, enhance listening competencies through storytelling. Further, storytelling and listening skills go together in a most enjoyable fashion. Writing and retelling activities can easily be added, thus, adding an enriching pair of dimensions. Storytelling is an integral part of the language arts program and enriching both as a artistic endeavor and a competence building activity.

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